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Entanglements of Trauma: Relationality and Toni Morrison's *Home*

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Introduction

There is at present an ongoing and lively discussion about new directions for trauma theory in postcolonial studies. It is by now received knowledge that postcolonial trauma theory needs a broader basis than that provided by psychoanalysis and deconstruction, and that it needs to be more comprehensive as well as more culturally specific. While the conceptual field of trauma theory has from the start enabled the inclusion of interdisciplinary research, postcolonial literary studies have been slow to develop innovative approaches to the exploration of trauma in their field. Now, however, there is a widespread understanding that a broader, interdisciplinary, comparative, and relational approach to trauma will open ways of accommodating not only culture-specific, but also broader registers of trauma research for postcolonial studies. This approach is what this article proposes to explore and demonstrate in a reading of Toni Morrison's novel *Home*, published in 2012, her last novel to date.

The theoretical framework of this reading is informed by Ella Shohat's notion of relationality, allowing for multiple perspectives and registers: between texts; between discourses; between disciplines (e.g. in this article, psychology, sociology, literary criticism, and moral philosophy); between histories, geographies, and communities. The further "double" reference of relationality, in Shohat's terms, is to relationality within the work itself, and as a method of reading (251). This openness to interconnections and interdisciplinarity is based on a firm commitment to a non-competitive approach, aligned with Michael Rothberg's multidirectionality. This article hopes to show that relationality presents a method of reading Morrison's *Home* that allows full scope to the many ways in which Morrison addresses, absorbs, and transforms pre-existing discourses on trauma and to the ways her tenth novel contributes not only to her own oeuvre on trauma and race, but also to conceptualisations of modes of healing and redress not currently privileged in trauma theory.

In the web of my discussion I draw together several major strands, which themselves contain various 'sub' strands of the relationality that the trauma in Morrison's novel invites, such as slavery and colonialism;

orality and psychotherapy; trauma in generic, ethical, and political contexts; as well as the intratextuality or self-referentiality of key notions in Morrison's oeuvre, such as home, race, and rememory. The trauma of racism, war, and postmemory that is at the heart of Morrison's *Home*, I will argue, invites this engagement, just as the novel's emphatic allusiveness situates it in a strong relation to Morrison's previous novels, and, surprisingly, provides a sense of closure to her novelistic project.

Trauma and Postcolonial Literary Studies: Ways Forward

It is no exaggeration to state that adverse criticism of the dominant trauma paradigm has been a constant in postcolonial literary studies, as has the continuing increase of trauma studies in the field, particularly after 2005. In 2008, Michael Rothberg, in an article summarizing various critical views on postcoloniality and trauma theory, expressed serious doubts as to whether in its current form "trauma provides the best framework for thinking about the legacies of violence in the colonized/postcolonial world" ("Decolonizing Trauma Studies" 226). In this same year, Roger Luckhurst's *The Trauma Question* posed an 'inconvenient' question to postcolonial trauma critics by pointing out the depoliticizing and dehistoricizing tendencies in trauma theory, and its "shocking" failure to address "atrocities, genocide and war" (213). After 2008 a consensus began to form as to what were seen as the shortcomings of trauma theory for postcolonial studies, which, as an article in 2009 expressed it, was in a "crisis situation," although trauma remained among the "hottest research topics" (Craps 51-2). This "crisis" has by now given way to a general awareness that the constraints of trauma theory necessitate expansion and redirection of the theory in order to adequately understand the problems of trauma during and after colonization. A number of publications in 2011 that examine the theory conclude that the tendency to prescriptiveness and reductiveness must be addressed and changes must be proposed to situate postcolonial trauma literature in broader yet also more specific societal and historical perspectives. In my article "Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literary Studies" (2011) I argue that it is time to move beyond the dominant mode in postcolonial literary studies which is that of resistance against cultural trauma theory's Eurocentrism and of pointing out its many inherent contradictions and instabilities. In their volume *The Splintered Glass: Facets of Trauma in the Post-Colony and Beyond* (2011), editors Dolores Herrero and Sonia Baelo-Allue suggest a change towards a sociological orientation in response to the general discontent with deconstructionist and psychoanalytical orientations. Merlinda Bobis, in an essay published in this collection, presents a convincing case for the inclusion of spirituality and oral modes of literary expression in postcolonial theories of trauma by illuminating how orality and rituals function as catalysts in processes of mourning and grieving in the

aftermath of traumatic events. Other critics, such as Ewald Mengel and Michela Borzaga, point out the complex interrelatedness of trauma, power, and politics in postcolonial literature, indicating that social activism and political protest may be integral to the aftermath of the trauma of colonization and decolonization. These critical contributions to a ‘decolonized trauma theory’ all attest to the present need to rethink and resolve the continuing tension between the desire for specificity and comprehensiveness in postcolonial literary studies, and to avoid the prescriptiveness of the currently dominant trauma theory in literary studies which, as critic Katherine Baxter writes, “potentially closes off other modes of presenting trauma” (19).

In postcolonial literary studies today, then, the growing consensus appears to be that the way forward in trauma research is to conceptualize trauma not by theorizing hierarchical structures which would privilege some conceptual approaches and delegitimize others, but by envisaging trauma as a complicated network of concepts and approaches, all centered around trauma. Given the current multi-disciplinary knowledge of trauma, this relational approach seems the most productive way forward for postcolonial trauma studies. This relationality may be visualized as an intricate knot, with the ‘unsayable’ nature of trauma at its center and connected to it, in a centripetal as well as centrifugal movement, to be envisaged as a multi- and interdisciplinary entanglement of strands of concepts, theories and therapies. I take this image of the knot from Roger Luckhurst, who in turn follows Bruno Latour’s theory of knowledge as consisting of complicated networks, as “hybrid assemblages” or “tangled objects,” rather than as hierarchies or clearly delineated categories (14). What Latour’s theory emphasizes is the *positive* nature of that intricacy, his theory being, in Luckhurst’s explanation, that “a concept succeeds through its heterogeneity rather than its purity” since “a successful statement can be measured by how many links or associations it makes, not only within the rigours of its own discipline but far beyond it, too, as it loops through different knowledges, institutions, practices, social, political and cultural forums” (14). The notion of the knotted intricacy of the trauma paradigm not only clearly illustrates the strong potential for fruitful connections among academic disciplines but also stimulates thinking about trauma theory’s potential for further additions and expansion.

Trauma, the center of the knot, may be envisaged as a void, or, in Derridean terms, as a kernel of the real of the literary, which resists and confounds our interpretive efforts. Nevertheless, in the literary domain, interpretation is enabled by a richness of representations; as Derrida states, “there is in literature, in the exemplary secret of literature, a chance of saying everything without touching upon the secret” (29). The knotted entanglement of trauma, which has a void at its center, may be illustrated as follows (Figure 1):



Figure 1, source: <http://juliefille.blogspot.nl/2010/03/knopen.html>

The Derridean “secret” or absence of knowing at the center of trauma and its narrative representation draws to it many strands of knowledge, while being itself ultimately unknowable and undefinable. This comparative and relational notion of trauma at the center of the tangled complexity of theories and concepts about trauma precludes an unproductive and possibly contentious positing of ‘either/or’ views and indeed renders superfluous the oppositional debates about definitions of trauma as either event-based or phylogenetic, knowable or unknowable, curable or incurable, static or dynamic, and so on. Relationality, as Shohat states in *Taboo Memories*, leads to productive questions and away from “reductive tendencies, demonstrating complexity, the multifaceted web of identifications, ambivalences and negotiations” (251).

An important advantage to the relational approach is that it poses a welcome and necessary alternative to the notion that trauma theory is primarily a theory of stasis and melancholia. This notion has been questioned throughout the relatively short history of trauma theory. For example, a recent publication by Mengel and Borzaga, *Trauma, Memory and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel* (2012), finds fault with the deconstructionist thinking of Caruth, Laub, and Hartman which, they state, uses a “*melancholic* vocabulary that is marked by notions of absence, holes, deferral, crises of meanings” because it precludes “any possibility of healing for individuals or entire nations” (xiii). I argue in this article that a relational reading of trauma literature may redress the balance by tying into the knotted entanglement of trauma theory this recuperative or transformative potential, without rejecting the Derridean notion of the ultimately unknowable and ‘unsayable’ nature of the full traumatic experience at the center of that entanglement. Morrison’s *Home* provides a striking image that concretizes this concept in the novel’s recurrent reference to a bay tree with a hollow space at its center, “a sweet bay tree split down the middle, beheaded, undead” (144)

which nevertheless has two firm branches that reach out; the tree continues to grow, despite the emptiness at its center.

Relationality as Postcolonial (Self-)Referentiality in *Home*

The novel's epigraph makes us aware at the outset that its central theme, 'home,' is to be read in relation to Morrison's previous fictional works. The lyrics "Whose house is this" are from a song cycle that Morrison wrote and that was set to music in 1992 by André Previn, long before the publication of *Home*. While the return to these lyrics at the threshold of this tenth novel underscores Morrison's abiding interest in identity issues of belonging, autonomy, and freedom, the novel's title, inevitably, also signals a possibility of closure. As the theme of longing for stability, acceptance, and togetherness, home has been central to Morrison's novelistic project from the start. In many of her narratives, cold and loveless homes are contrasted with warm and loving homes; in *Sula* (1973), Sula's home is one of cold disorder, whereas Nel's home is orderly and warm. In *Song of Solomon* (1977), Milkman Dead's family is relatively affluent but their home is chilly, or "dead," in human relationships. The theme of home also provides central motifs in *Tar Baby* (1981), *Jazz* (1992), and most strikingly in Morrison's acclaimed novel *Beloved* (1987); such motifs, which are also prominent in *Home*, include the characters' return to a hometown that was once left and their rebuilding a home there, seeking a place of safety and growth, whilst attempting to live with (literally) or come to terms with the ghosts of the past.

In *Home* the central contrast is between the cold and loveless home of Frank and Cee's childhood and the warm and welcoming home offered by the women in Lotus. The words of the lyrics "Say, tell me, why does its lock fit [their] key" already foreshadow the protagonists' amazement at finding a home in Lotus, Georgia, the hometown that they once hated and left at the first available opportunity and now reluctantly return to only to find that they belong there; in the words of Morrison's song, that "its lock fit my key." Whereas in the novels preceding *Home* there is no final sense of achieving that place of acceptance and belonging, *Home* does in fact provide a sense of homecoming, that, as I will argue, may be read as a form of closure to Morrison's engagement with the trauma of slavery and colonization, which John Updike in the *New Yorker* in 2008 described as her "noble and necessary fictional project of exposing the infamies of slavery and the hardships of being African American" (par. 6).

The connotations of 'home' are belonging and freedom, and in Morrison's work, the theme also has a strong postcolonial referentiality. The exclusion of African Americans from the liberty that constitutes a major democratic principle of the American nation is one of Morrison's central themes, dramatized in each of her works. As Sharon Rose Wilson

writes, Morrison is a postcolonial writer who “powerfully critiques U.S. colonialism of both past and present, the system of patriarchal racism, sexism, and classism that has not only denied the freedom, self-determination, and even humanity of African Americans, but has sometimes literally colonized the bodies of people who live within its territories and borders” (78). In postcolonial trauma studies, primary formal criteria for ‘authentic’ trauma literature are narrative rupture and aporia. These criteria derive from Holocaust studies and comprise various modes of interruptions and disjunction of style, tense, and focalization, as well as compulsive repetition of telling and retelling (Eaglestone 42-65). In the substantial body of criticism that Morrison’s work has generated, the formal disruptions and the non-linearity of her novels’ plot structures have also been interpreted in the light of Morrison’s postcolonial project to rewrite American history from an African American perspective. Jean Wyatt, using concepts from trauma theory in her article on Morrison’s novel *Love*, regards these as “formal breaks in chronological sequence [that] reflect the upheavals and the psychic dislocations that accompany ... [African American] history of disruption, dispossession, and displacement” (193). It is noteworthy that in this tenth novel Morrison departs from that structural pattern of disruption and non-linearity, keeping to a chronology that strengthens the progressive narrative arc of Frank Money’s journey homeward, and which is furthermore paralleled by the same progressive narrative arc of the fairy tale of Hansel and Gretel and their eventual homecoming that Morrison uses as a generic signifier in this novel. Disturbing traumatic memories frequently disrupt the flow of Frank’s thinking, but they do not disrupt the novel’s overall temporal progression. Instead, the flashbacks, as symptoms of Frank’s profound traumatization, occur less frequently and less intrusively as the therapeutic process of narrating continues, reinforcing the idea of a narrative progression towards closure.

Frank’s trauma narrative in *Home* fully engages African Americans’ history of enslavement, disenfranchisement, and continuing oppression and discrimination. Like Morrison’s other works, it presents this history as the search for a place of acceptance and safety, for belonging, and exposes its obstruction and disruption by laws, regulations and racial prejudice. In Morrison’s view, slavery and colonization are major traumas of history, similar to the holocaust; in an interview she compared slavery to “having World War II for two hundred years” (qtd in Tally xiv). The opening dedication “Sixty Million and more” in her novel *Beloved* not only calls to mind the many millions who died as a result of slavery but also connects them with the well-known number of the six million Jews who were killed under the Nazi regime in World War II. This referentiality has aroused some negative reactions, primarily in the social media, where some denounced Morrison’s equation of the two historical phenomena as diminishing the traumatic memory of the Holocaust, and others felt that this was unjust to the victims of slavery. From a relational perspective,

such a polarity of positions is needlessly confrontational and, moreover, unproductive in formulating ways of understanding collective trauma.

Perhaps the most eloquent of proponents of a relational approach is Michael Rothberg, who, in his *Multidirectional Memory* as well as in many other publications, has argued persuasively that the Holocaust, slavery, and colonialism are historical events whose re-enactment through narrative must not be seen as contesting for primacy but rather as existing together, in the sense that memories of traumatic collective pasts resonate profoundly. The longer memory of slavery, Rothberg states, aids memory studies of the holocaust (*Multidirectional Memory* 148). Trauma, in Rothberg's term, is multidirectional in the sense of connecting different discourses and different national histories; the relationality between Holocaust, colonialism, slavery, and racism need not be seen through "the lens of 'competitive memory' through which these problems are generally thought" ("In the Nazi Cinema" 19). This is aligned with Shohat and Stam's call for a greater emphasis on interconnectedness in academic studies, rather than the praxis of "segregating historical periods and geographical regions into neatly fenced-off areas of expertise" and pitting "a rotating chain of oppositional communities against a White European dominant" (*Unthinking Eurocentrism* 6).

Morrison poses that same interconnectedness by making her protagonist in *Home* not only a veteran of the Korean war but also a bearer of collective memory of racial violence and persecution. America's 'political action' in Korea and its racial discrimination at home are intertwined in Frank's memories, reinforced by further parallels made in the novel between 1950s racism and nineteenth-century slavery. During Frank's long homeward journey from the desegregated army through the racially divided USA of the early 1950s, he receives support and protection from a secret African American chain of helpers that resembles the nineteenth-century Underground Railway. The first of these helpers is significantly named Reverend Jean Locke, calling into play the philosopher John Locke's well-known influence on the American Constitution through his model of participatory democracy, or rule by the people. The irony of this allusion is obvious: Rev. Locke remarks that "an integrated army is integrated misery" and warns Frank that in his home country, racist violence is still "custom" and "just as real as law" (19). Morrison suggests that soldiers like Frank, on returning to their native country, find themselves without a 'home' similar to the slaves of the previous century that sought to escape bondage; 'home' here means the country or political state of belonging and protection that is denied to them. We read that Frank, witnessing the home atmosphere in Locke's warm family circle, thinks of the meaning of belonging to such a family and "could imagine nothing at all" (20). With these kinds of references Morrison positions herself in this tenth novel once more as a strong social protest writer and accentuates this by a humorous self-reflexive reference to the play *The Morrison Case*, which is performed at the theatre where Frank's girlfriend Lily works. *The Morrison Case* is in fact a play by

Albert Maltz which, due to McCarthyism, did not get permission to perform; Maltz was one of the 1950s social protest playwrights who were put on the blacklist by the HUAC, the American House Un-American Activities Committee. This reference adds to the sense that the function of this, Morrison's tenth novel, is to build an intricate construction of previous themes (Morrison's 'case'), including the themes of political trauma and its narratives.

"The Structure Is the Argument"

In using the relational and multidirectional approach to trauma in my reading of Toni Morrison's novel *Home*, I distinguish several strands in the knot, or imbroglio, that this trauma novel presents. A taut novel of moderate length, far more compressed than any of Morrison's previous novels about trauma, memory, race, and orality, it draws into its narrative world not only these major themes, but also joins them with a further major issue: the nature of the therapeutic engagement with trauma. This is foregrounded in the novel by the structural device of the frame narrative: Frank Money, the traumatized war veteran, relates his personal story to a listener, who is the (nameless and faceless) author of his written text. This narrative frame structure is unique to Morrison's work, and if, in Morrison's own words, "the structure is the argument" (qtd in Schappell and Lacour 101), this in itself marks the argument in *Home* as different from Morrison's previous subtexts. What it poses, first, is that not writing, but oral narrative is the pathway to health, albeit a difficult one; Frank often feels "imprisoned in his own strivings" (24) to tell the tale, yet in the process notices that his nightmares and memories become less intrusive. The stories are Frank's own, as he retains agency, but at the same time they are also transferred, filtered through a second person's empathic and literary consciousness. This is not to say that in structuring the novel as a therapeutic encounter (in the setting of Frank's oral narrative and the listener/scribe) Morrison de-emphasizes the political argument, but rather, that she draws together the political, the social, and the psychological, in a further, necessary 'tangle' to the intricacies of trauma in *Home*.

The political dimension of trauma narratives may be deemed central to the purpose of trauma analysis in postcolonial studies. In oral testimony such as Frank's narrative, psychological factors are often inextricably connected to political factors. Morrison's *Home* dramatizes the importance of oral trauma narratives in effecting change, both on a political level, in the cause of justice, and on the personal level. Frank's narrative of himself as a homeless, traumatized veteran is not only a story of personal trauma, but it is also the story of African-American soldiers like him; in this sense it is like the trauma narratives of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission testimonies, which, as Mengel, Borzaga and Orantes state, are never only "particular and singular" but must be seen as

“continuous” and “multiple” (*Trauma, Memory: Interviews* xvii). The peculiar framework to Frank’s narrative resembles the testimonial mode, the ‘storytelling’ process of soliciting and recording narratives of violations of human rights that, according to Fiona C. Ross in her article on the after-effects of testimonies given during the hearings of the TRC, has become a “a newly established, authoritative and very powerful genre” (330). This form of testifying was explicitly used by the Commission as a methodology to ascertain truth and to lead to healing, as Ross states, and it has since become standardized, widely broadcast, and embedded in a public repertoire (330).¹ Frank’s process of oral witnessing is what sociologist Jeffrey C. Alexander terms a “trauma process,” the process that gives narrative shape and meaning to “harmful or overwhelming phenomena which are believed to have deeply harmed collective identity” (10). Collective trauma, in Alexander’s definition, is not the traumatic event or its latent presence, but the result of a sociocultural act of constructing traumatic experience through narrative. Imagination, association, and dramatization—all part of the territory of literary studies—are essential to this process of constructing collective trauma. Employing this term, we may state that the trauma process of African-American history has been Morrison’s main objective in her career, and that it constitutes her major achievement as an author.

Psychotherapists agree that identity change, or transformation, is possible through the recounting of a life narrative, but it is important to understand that this transformation takes place in a complex social and cultural context, and that much depends on the localized community of shared values and beliefs for narrative to be beneficial to the process of recovery from political and personal trauma and psychic wounding (Lieblich et al. 4). Morrison’s novels repeatedly draw attention to the importance of community in healing processes, and in particular to the role of women in communities. In *Home*, the community of women in Lotus provide life-saving care, nurturing both Cee and Frank back to health; their simple Christian faith (“Mourning was helpful but God was better” 123) and indomitable moral principles, particularly about women’s autonomy and self-liberating powers (“You ain’t a mule to be pulling some evil doctor’s wagon” 122), are signal factors in the recovery process of both protagonists. While in the initial setting, Frank’s scribe has the role of the silent therapist, at the end of the narrative the women “who loved mean” (121) provide a stronger therapeutic, communal environment. This goes against the grain of Caruthian trauma theory, then, in which alienation, melancholia, and a weakening of social ties are primary characteristics of trauma. In *Home* Morrison poses that while trauma may cause social fracture, it can also lead to a stronger sense of belonging. This is aligned with the views of Kai Erikson, a sociologist who was one of the first to theorize collectivity and trauma, whose research demonstrates that trauma can serve as a source of community “just as a common language or a common cultural background can” (231).

In *Home*, the centripetal, communal forces prove stronger than the centrifugal, political forces.

The Trauma Process in *Home*

Home is a novel about trauma and memory, as much as Morrison's acclaimed *Beloved*, and perhaps even more so, due to the personal oral narrative that frames the novel. More than any other of Morrison's novels, *Home* dramatizes the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), in particular disrupted sleep patterns, enhanced sensitivity to stressors, over-excitability alternating with lethargy, as well as intrusive and crippling memories. Frank Money, a "tilted man" (80), has horrific memories which frequently bring on a numbed, melancholic state of dissociation or incite him to violent, cruelly aggressive rages. Frank's debilitating and aggressive emotions are first presented as the result of his memories of the deaths of his two 'home boys' on the battlefield, his survivor's guilt and anger translating as "shame and its fury exploded" (24). Morrison adds further meaning to these memories by making them screen memories, hiding a deeper and more profoundly disturbing memory of Frank's own brutal and impulsive murder of a young Korean girl. Frank's screen memory is of a fellow soldier on guard duty who kills a child that comes crawling towards them; he "blows her away" when she makes sexual advances, saying "yum-yum" and displaying her two missing front teeth (95). This memory of the child is connected with Frank's formative memory of himself and Cee as young children, crawling through the high grass (3) and referenced deliberately in his memory of "Cee and me trying to steal peaches off the ground under Miss Robinson's tree, sneaking, crawling..." (94). These interrelated memories of childhood hunger and "sneaking and crawling" combine to create a web of meaning in which trauma event and aftermath become indistinguishable. The complexity increases when at a later time Frank's trauma process leads him to an underlying, gradually accessible truth: that it was he and not his comrade who shot the girl, blowing her face away and severing the hand that still clutched an orange.

Hunger, sexual desire, protectiveness of his sister, war tension, and war trauma constitute the entanglement of Frank's disclosures to the nameless scribe. It is through the trauma process – the construction of his oral narrative-- that Frank's memories are brought under conscious control and lose their intrusive and disruptive force. The drive to tell seems itself a factor of trauma; like the biological processes of healing that are prompted by physical injuries, the psychic process too, may be instigated by the traumatic wounding itself. The capacity to tell, to relate memories, sensations, and feelings, can be the "primary mechanism through which individuals are able to maintain a sense of self-worth in the face of moral, social and personal failings," according to psychotherapists Maruna and

Ramsden, and it is particularly self-narratives that “may be crucial in the management and resolution of the shame that results from violating shared ethical codes” (131). What Frank’s eventual realization of the truth hidden behind his screen memory demonstrates is the potential for full recollection of the traumatic event. This has implications that warrant closer attention, for what this development in Frank’s trauma process shows is that Morrison envisages a recalling of trauma that brings the true nature of the traumatic event to light. This stands in clear contradiction to Caruth’s foundational notion that traumatic memory in narrativization is a loss, or even a betrayal of the true and literal nature of the traumatic event: “the loss, precisely, of the event’s essential incomprehensibility, the force of its affront to understanding.” Caruth even goes so far as to speak of the betrayal of “the truth of the traumatic past, which cannot be represented” (154).

While leaving intact the notion that the full or true nature of the traumatic event defies description, Morrison’s text affirms that the factual truth of the traumatic event *can* be retrieved and known, and represented in oral narrative to beneficial effect.² Another point that can be deduced from the representation of trauma in *Home* is that the retrieval of memory is a recursive process, with mistakes and rectifications, since Frank’s initial remembering, even of recent events, is corrected in the course of his ongoing narrative. An example of this is when Frank returns to a story he had told about a couple he met on the train to change it substantially, making clear that his first telling was incorrect. Morrison’s point in presenting these corrections seems to be that only in the recursive process of telling and remembering can truth emerge. Caruth’s idea of an unbridgeable gap between knowing and representation is thus refuted by Morrison’s novel which poses that during the trauma process, actual and literal memories can be retrieved and known; moreover, the traumatic memory, orally related, is not ‘frozen in time’ or static but can be retrieved, even if incorrectly, revisited and corrected.³

A detailed and persuasive argument against Caruth’s narrow conceptualization, and in support of Morrison’s representation of the trauma process, is made by philosopher Susan J. Brison, whose book *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (2002) employs relationality, what Brison calls “a range of complementary methodologies,” in combining insights from neurology, psychology, philosophy as well as Brison’s personal experience with trauma and its aftermath (xi). Brison, a survivor of sexual assault, disagrees fundamentally with Caruth’s theory of the ‘unsayability’ of trauma, because it “makes it conceptually impossible for a survivor to bear reliable witness to the trauma,” as silence is “the only authentic and ethically defensible response” (71). The relational approach, I would suggest, enables the view that silence and absence remain at the heart of the trauma process, but that vital aspects of the traumatic event, including physical experiences as well as feelings of shame and guilt, can be brought to cognition as a result of the therapeutic process of narration. In *Home*, this

act of oral disclosure enables an owning of the situation and a movement forward towards integration of even the worst, most inassimilable of memories, as Frank's memory of killing the Korean girl surely must be.

The narrative of trauma requires a listener; Morrison's listener is silent, fully attentive, and as invisible as an implied author. This allows Frank to emerge as an autonomous, yet also fully relational narrator. Morrison here draws on a significant psychological aspect of trauma narratives, in which, as Brison states, the autonomous self and the relational self are interdependent, "even constitutive of one another" (61). The relational nature of autonomy in the trauma process needs to be understood from the fact that trauma victims incur a loss of connectedness, as Brison argues, and it is this loss that trauma survivors mourn, "a loss that in turn imperils selfhood" (61). This view accords with Martha Nussbaum's concept of this same relationality as a cognitive process in the evaluative reception of trauma. In her book *Upheavals of Thought* Nussbaum sees traumatic memory as disrupted linearity, which if it becomes non-relational, constitutes a new traumatic reality; the loss of trust in the social world entails the isolation from community (318). Trauma victims experience dislocation in the fullest sense of the word; *Home* depicts Frank Money in this state, imprisoned in this 'new' closed-in traumatic reality during his year-long stay in Seattle, a long way from home. To break out of this traumatic world, Nussbaum states, autonomy, as the capacity to form essential relationships with others, must be enabled and re-established. It is Frank's response to the call to save his sister that frees him from stasis, as a first step on the road to full autonomy, in Nussbaum's sense of the capacity to re-connect to others.

In her analysis of Morrison's entire fictional oeuvre before the publication of *Home*, Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber demonstrates that the influence of family and community is a vital factor in Morrison's novels in helping trauma victims come to terms with their past and "moderate trauma, and, as a result, self-esteem" (9). In *Home*, Morrison reinforces this notion in depicting Frank's deeply crippling sense of dislocation and non-belonging, as well as his gradually successful struggle to reconnect. More than in any previous novel, Morrison here asserts community as instrumental in bringing about a positive outcome to the trauma process. This is borne out by findings in psychotherapy. By linking one's own life to forces greater than one's self, coherence can be achieved, Maruna and Ramsden state (141). Judith Butler, phrasing this same phenomenon in political terms, states that trauma's grief "furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order, and it does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorising fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility" (22). It is an important realization that the trauma process discloses, and also derives from the fact that the nature of selfhood is relationality. Brison's in-depth study of trauma allows her to conclude that "the accounts of the embodied self, the self as narrative, and the autonomous self are compatible and complementary, focusing on different aspects of the self"; and finally,

“that the study of trauma provides additional support for the view that each of these aspects of the self is fundamentally relational” (41). From these various strands (psychological and philosophical) tied into the web of the entanglement of trauma in Morrison’s *Home*, then, it may be concluded that in the understanding of trauma, the relationship between the trauma victim and the social environment (i.e. the listeners as first recipients of the trauma narrative as well as the narrator’s community) is a vital factor, as a necessary expansion to the individual-based conception of trauma in early trauma theory. A further, necessary and major strand in my reading of the trauma knot presented by *Home* is Morrison’s self-reflexivity.

The Relationality of Memory: Formative Memory, Rememory, and Postmemory in *Home*

The formative childhood experience that is the first memory narrated in the opening chapter to the book sets out the complexity of the novel’s themes. Frank’s memory is of witnessing a violent encounter between stallions and the secret burial of a corpse, while at the same time protecting his little sister. This short opening chapter shows Frank’s pride (at age nine) at being able to protect Cee (aged five) and get them both to safety, but the memory has also left a deep impact that is less easy to interpret: the sublime experience of witnessing the horses’ masculine power and aggression in a scene of imposing beauty (“they stood like men” (5)), followed by the uncanny sight of the secret burial of a black man, killed by his own son in a fight to the death arranged by whites. This entanglement is at the basis of Frank’s further narrative in which he struggles to recall and express his memories, and in this process his initial sense of masculine honour and the glory of men fighting is gradually changed; the beauty of the memory of the horses is replaced by the knowledge of their fate (the slaughterhouse). Frank learns that honour resides not in fighting, but in non-violent acts such as his carrying Cee to safety, and the reburial of the remains of the murdered man. At the end of the narrative, Frank digs a perpendicular grave under the bay tree enabling the corpse to stand like a man, a masculine honour denied him by white tormentors during his life, and one that is without aggression. Thus, in returning to the place of his formative memory, Frank reinforces his capacity for protective love, and diminishes his proclivity for aggressive masculinity. The process of oral narrative is a memory process that eventually leads to this unexpected recovery of Frank’s core identity as nurturing, protective, and gentle.

In Morrison’s work, this process of remembering is given the term ‘rememory’ to indicate the deliberate act of revisiting a memory, in the sense that one’s personal memory is at the same time also collective, or cultural memory. In *Beloved*, Sethe explains the concept of ‘rememory’ to

her daughter Denver, using the example of a picture that belongs to a place, but not to a time or a person: “If a house burns down, it's gone, but the picture of it stays, and not just in my re-memory, but out there, in the world. ... even if I die, the picture ... is still out there. Right in the place where it happened” (61). These words express the collectivity as well as the local aspect of memory, which is akin to what Whitehead, in her book *Memory*, terms ‘body memory’: the visual and sensory memory connected to place (11).

Rememory, then, is both individual and collective; collectivity resides in the continuity of memory, and its transmission through generations. Morrison’s personal term rememory resembles the concept of postmemory, first formulated by Marianne Hirsch in relation to the remembrance of the Holocaust: “the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right” (103). In postcolonial or decolonized trauma theory, the complexity of the transmitted memories of chronic persecution and oppression may be understood from the perspective of Morrison’s rememory as well as Hirsch’s postmemory: they are personal and collective memories in a manner that cannot be extricated; the knot here connects the personal and collective in indistinguishable entangled identity aspects, similar to the genetic and experiential coherence of disparate strands of lived experience and transmitted experience in memory processes. The distinction between memory, postmemory, and Morrison’s rememory may further be understood in the light of Aristotle’s distinction between memory and recollection: memory is a recoverable impression of a past occurrence, and recollection is the recovery itself, the investigation or process that can take us to a memory that is not by itself retrievable.

Recollection (conscious memory retrieval) and postmemory (transgenerational memory) are both part of Morrison’s concept of rememory (which is both verb and noun), which is also a relational concept. In Chicago, Frank eats in a place with “quick, down-home friendliness” where he talks “freely” with others who tell stories of past hurt, hunger, homelessness, and persecution (29). Morrison here dramatizes collective memory as a relational, communal process of narrative, which creates a sense of ‘home’ and ‘freedom’. Formative experiences of Morrison’s characters throughout her oeuvre are of racial violence, persecution, and the need to protect and be protected. *Home* has several plotlines in which African Americans are denied the right to a home (Lenore’s loss of home and husband; Lily’s legal difficulties in acquiring a home) all connected to Frank’s childhood experience of his family being run out of their “little neighbourhood at the edge of town” (10) in Bandera County, Texas. During their forced move from Texas to Georgia the family gets aid from a Mr. Gardener, a name reminiscent of the Garners of Sweet Home in *Beloved*, underscoring another motif in Morrison’s work, which is that the help given by some white people is

insignificant compared to the injustices committed by the white majority. Self-referential (or intratextual) allusions abound in *Home*, strongly connecting this novel to *Beloved*, Morrison's best-known and most influential work, commonly regarded as "a formative text in literary trauma studies" (Luckhurst 90).

Traumatic memories in *Home* and *Beloved* are postmemories and rememories intertwined, and given various novelistic formal features, such as the ghost/daughter character in *Beloved*, and Cee's ghost baby girl in *Home*, a haunting which merges with Frank's memory of the Korean child. The tree imagery used in *Beloved* and *Home* is another strong connection between the two novels, and both, at first glance, symbolize traumatogenic racial hatred. Frank's rememory process brings to conscious awareness his witnessing, at the age of four, the cruel murder of old Crawford, who refused to leave the magnolia tree planted by his great-grandmother in Bandera County at the time of the 'cleansing' or forced eviction, and was buried under the magnolia tree. If this tree symbolizes the importance of heritage and freedom, Frank's memory foregrounds their destruction by white racism. Sethe's 'chokecherry tree' in *Beloved* is a mass of scar tissue on her back, the visible memory of racist violence and abuse. However, trees in Morrison's work symbolize not only racist violence and inhumanity, but also the forces of resilience and regeneration. In her detailed discussion of the tree symbolism in *Beloved*, Sharon Rose Wilson disagrees with the critics that have seen the tree on Sethe's back as a negative image of "slavery, death and repressed pain" (81). Based on her extensive knowledge of tree symbolism in myth and folklore, and on Morrison's specific usage in *Beloved*, Wilson concludes that Morrison's tree images are "markers of freedom, transformation, healing, and rebirth ... the possibility of life beyond slavery's wasteland" (81-2). In *Home*, a similar argument can be made. The burial rites performed at the end of the narrative for the "gentleman" victim of racial violence (his skull "clean and smiling") under the bay tree remind us of Crawford's burial under his grandmother's magnolia tree, but the connotation is of restored dignity and regained vitality, signifying a celebration of transformation, in a peaceful scene resplendent with vibrant colours, fireflies, hummingbirds, and honeybees (143). "Trauma changes shapes and meaning as it crosses boundaries; it is constituted out of the controversies generated in these passages," as Luckhurst observes (209). In passing from past to present, from postmemory to rememory, trauma changes in the process of oral narration and acquires new meaning. In *Home*, this change is intensified by Morrison's choice of interface between novel and fairy tale, a narrative framing that further increases the entanglement of trauma and narrative.

Fairy Tale as Intertext

To the various relational dimensions in *Home* Morrison adds the generic and imaginative dimension of fairy tales. In this novel's bleak and violent intricacy of trauma and rememory Morrison interweaves the seemingly simple and reassuring fairy tale story of Hansel and Gretel. Less visible than the plot lines of Frank's war trauma and Cee's physical abuse, the fairy tale strand nevertheless adds an important symbolic and structural significance to the story, and eventually augments the sense of closure that this novel achieves. This particular fairy tale has held a lifelong fascination for Morrison, as she has disclosed in various interviews and lectures, in particular its theme of the close, and non-sexual relationship between brother and sister. Far from being subtle or hinted at, the fairy tale parallel is emphatically drawn in *Home*; we read that in their loveless childhood home, "Frank and Cee, like some forgotten Hansel and Gretel, locked hands as they navigated the silence and tried to imagine a future" (53). This deliberate referencing accentuates the primacy of relationality in this novel, joining to the knotted intricacy another major element of Morrison's artistic imagination and novelistic work, but in a new, and positive configuration, drawing on Hansel and Gretel's story of hardship and deprivation overcome through courage and sibling love. In the fairy tale, Hansel and Gretel are deprived of their home and sent into the woods, there to find the insidious, 'sweet' home of the witch's gingerbread house.

In *Home*, Frank's earliest memories are of being deprived of their home in Texas; Cee is born en route, in a church basement. Their new domicile in Lotus, Georgia, is remembered in Frank's later life as "the worst place in the world" (83). Morrison's choice of this name draws in the Lotus eaters of Greek mythology; in the *Odyssey*, the Lotus-eaters lack energy and inspiration, and live in a state of comatose apathy. In Lotus, Georgia, the parents work sixteen hours a day picking cotton and planting crops, while the children are raised by their cold and cruel grandmother. Like Hansel and Gretel, Frank and Cee also only find protection and affection with each other. The witch's gingerbread house is paralleled by Dr Scott's evil mansion, the place where illegal and life-threatening surgical experiments are performed on Cee. In a direct allusion to the fairy tale, Cee is first fattened up, her appetite becoming enormous, similar to Beloved's enormous appetite, indicative of starvation through lack of affective relationships. While in the fairy tale Hansel is rescued by Gretel, in *Home* it is Frank who takes on the role of rescuer, in a reversal of gender that accentuates the need for Frank to relinquish notions of masculine honour through aggression and violence. Indeed, Frank uses no violence against Dr. Scott but carries Cee away in his arms. The tale of Hansel and Gretel ends in the same way as the tale of Frank and Cee: with the protagonists returning to the home from which they started and now finding health and happiness there. In the novel's final chapter, the text is set as a poem that celebrates the bay tree and its symbolism:

*It looked so strong
So beautiful.
Hurt right down the middle
But alive and well.*

This poetic rendering underscores growth despite traumatic wounding; the bay tree is irrevocably damaged at its center but has olive-green leaves like the biblical olive branch brought back from the waters of devastation. Despite the fact that trauma remains the ineradicable void at the center (Cee's mutilated womb, and Frank's "hook" in his chest (135)), the protagonists are ready to move forward, "alive and well," secure in their sense of belonging; "Come on brother," Cee says. "Let's go home" (147).

This 'fairy tale' happy ending to Morrison's novel has been negatively reviewed, with reviewers, critics, and bloggers deploring the romantic ending to this trauma narrative, and pointing out that it is perplexingly different from Morrison's other works. Reviewing *Home* for *The Guardian*, Sarah Churchwell wrote that *Home* "should be relentless, unsparing" and that if Morrison had ended the novel in the way it began, "it might have been one of her best in years" but that, instead, Morrison "refuses to confront the violence she has invoked" (par.7). It is indeed important to note that this remarkable ending distinguishes *Home* from Morrison's previous novels. In her astute discussion of Morrison's fiction, Rebecca Hope Ferguson concludes convincingly that in Morrison's oeuvre "there can be no final movement of return, no closure or healing in a restorative spiritual journey" (288). While a positive potential, or a movement towards progress may occur at the ending of Morrison's fiction, Ferguson concludes, it is just as often that "this movement takes place in a range of directions, or in a direction that is then repeated in reverse" (282-83). It is evident that *Home*, the novel that appeared after Ferguson's study, alters this conclusion. By the same token, Schreiber's analysis of all of Morrison's fiction before *Home* concludes that no positive resolution of trauma and conflict is achieved in Morrison's works. Unlike Morrison's other novels, then, this tenth novel holds out the possibility of closure and healing. The ending is one of triumph and homecoming, as is the fairy tale of Hansel and Gretel, whose "main thrust," according to Bruno Bettelheim, "is a warning against regression, and an encouragement of growth toward a higher plane of psychological and intellectual existence" (165). Fairy-tale theorist Jack Zipes states that the traditional "Hansel and Gretel" is a story of hope; it is about escape and returning home, and its modern use may be seen as a utopian revision seeking to "defend the imagination and the humane spirit" (158-160). The sense of closure that Morrison uniquely provides in this tenth novel, I would suggest, rests on this decision to defend the imaginative, humane spirit, despite the actual and ineradicable reality of discrimination and injustice.

Concluding Remarks

Drawing not only on her previous oeuvre, but also on the relational affect of fairy tales, and the therapeutic working of oral narrative, Morrison's *Home* engages once more with her hallmark themes of the traumas of slavery and racism, but it also interrogates them and transforms them in a manner new and unique to her work. Morrison's concise novel is in this respect by far the most relational of her works, in the sense of Shohat's notion that a work is relational if it engages, explores, absorbs, and transforms pre-existing discourses by bringing new ideas on board (252). The metaphor of the knot, I have suggested, illuminates the entanglement of trauma and its aftermath in personal and collective memory as Morrison presents it in her novel *Home*. Trauma, whether it is the narrative of personal trauma, the fictional representation of collective trauma, or a theoretical exploration of the political and ethical dimensions of trauma, invites a multi-faceted perspective; trauma is a complex gathering of diverse strands, a knotted intricacy whose heart remains elusive and impossible to define. What emerges from a reading of *Home* is that melancholia and social disruption are not the life sentence for trauma victims, nor need PTSD or social weakening set the limit of our engagement with trauma in literature.

It stands to reason, however, that the resolution of the trauma of the colonized subject is a complex and potentially controversial concept that must be used with caution in the engagement with postcolonial literature. Used with discernment, with clear recognition of literary representations of differences in ethnicity and power relations, concepts such as reconciliation, resolution and forgiveness may be added to the repertoire of postcolonial trauma criticism. As Ewald Mengel states with reference to South African literature, the fragile notion of reconciliation is part of the "entanglement" of trauma (*Trauma, Memory: Essays* viii). In Morrison criticism until *Home*, reconciliation has received little critical attention, but *Home* poses it as a profound possibility. While it is the business of postcolonial literary criticism to continue to address political inequality and injustice, and while it is, by the same token, the business of a postcolonial trauma theory to address discrepancies in traumatization as an effect of political or social relations, postcolonial trauma criticism should expand its scope to include movements and texts that speak of resilience and rejuvenation, and what Mengel describes as the "crucial questions of how change and transformation might become possible" (*Trauma, Memory: Essays* x). Reconciliation as the outcome of trauma processes cannot be taken for granted, nor can it be prescribed in any manner or form, but it can be suggested and explored through literature, much as Morrison suggests it in her poetic evocation of a tree's growth despite wounding, at the close of her novel.

Notes

1. While Ross presents the testimonial form as a powerful means in “the ongoing work of fashioning the self” (330), she also notes the reductive, homogenizing methods of reportage in media coverage and in the TRC’s Report which did not reflect the complexity and the “rich performative context and content” of the testimonies (329).
2. In her essay “The Site of Memory” (1995) Morrison observes that it is precisely her objective and responsibility as a novelist to imaginatively and truthfully present the inner life of the victims of violent and horrific acts of slavery and racist oppression, building on the “memories within,” i.e. her own recollections as well as those of others (102).
3. This part of Caruth’s thinking has been criticized by various critics, and perhaps most consistently and astutely by Ruth Leys, in her book *Trauma: A Genealogy* (2000) as well as in later publications, e.g. “Trauma and the Turn to Affect” (2012).

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